

## **Federal Children and Family Services Reviews - Overview**

The federal government is conducting comprehensive reviews of state child welfare programs under Titles IV-B and IV-E. Title IV-B provides funds to states for the general operation of child welfare programs and Title IV-E provides reimbursement for eligible out-of-home care and related administrative costs.

States will be evaluated on 14 items, including 7 outcome measures and 7 systemic factors. The outcome portion involves review of state data and on-site case reviews of random sample of cases from 3 sites, one of which must be the largest urban area (Milwaukee). States can negotiate the other sites. Cases reviewed will include both abuse/neglect and out-of-home care cases, and the reviews will involve in-depth interviews with child, family, care provider, case worker, court staff and service providers. The systemic portion involves review of state policies and overall program operation through stakeholder interviews at the state level and local sites.

The review will begin with the state completing a comprehensive assessment followed by on-site review by team of federal and state reviewers at the three sites. State compliance is determined for each of the 14 items based on the assessment, state data, case reviews and stakeholder interviews. The state must do program improvement plan for each item of non-compliance, with maximum of 2 years to show improvement. Improvement plan must show measurable improvement goals and state must meet goals to avoid penalties.

The first review in Wisconsin will occur in FFY 2003, with the on-site portion occurring in summer 2003 and the state assessment starting in late 2002. If the state has any items of noncompliance, a follow-up federal review will occur in 2 years. If the state is in full compliance, subsequent reviews are on a 5-year cycle.

The Department of Health and Family Services is preparing for the federal review by conducting a statewide assessment process for county child welfare programs in 2001 to analyze the factors affecting program outcomes at the local level. The Department is also establishing an executive steering committee consisting of persons from various state agencies and other organizations with an interest in child welfare to advise the Department on establishing program improvement goals.

Penalties can be imposed by the federal government against IV-B and IV-E funds received by the state for each item of non-compliance. Penalties start at 1% per item, which would be approximately \$150,000 per item for Wisconsin, and continue until state comes into compliance. Penalties will be withheld during program improvement plan if state is making significant progress on improvement goals. The penalty increases to 2% and then 3% per item if noncompliance continues at subsequent reviews.

The following pages explain the 7 outcome measures and 7 systemic factors in greater detail.

## **Federal Children and Family Service Reviews – Outcome Measures**

The seven outcome measures use a combination of statewide data as reported to the federal NCANDS (abuse and neglect) and AFCARS (foster care and adoption) databases and observations from on-site visits. Each outcome can have multiple performance indicators and both statewide data and on-site observations are used for some indicators. National performance standards have been established for some (\*) indicators. The on-site reviews will include reviews of specific cases and stakeholder interviews to determine compliance with federal requirements and state requirements that implement federal child welfare policy.

### Safety Outcome 1 - Protection of children from abuse and neglect:

1. Timeliness of investigating reports of maltreatment - on-site.
2. Repeat maltreatment of children - statewide data. (\*)
3. Repeat maltreatment of children - on-site.
4. Maltreatment by foster care providers - statewide data. (\*)

### Safety Outcome 2 - Maintain children safely in their homes where appropriate:

1. Services to protect children and prevent removal - on-site.
2. Risk of harm to child (risk assessment) - on-site.

### Permanency Outcome 1 - Permanence and stability of living situations:

1. Re-entry of children into foster care - statewide data. (\*)
2. Re-entry of children into foster care - on-site.
3. Length of stay in foster care - statewide data.
4. Stability of foster care placement - statewide data. (\*)
5. Stability of foster care placement - on-site.
6. Permanency goals for children - on-site.
7. Time to achieve permanency goal of reunification - statewide data. (\*)
8. Time to achieve permanency goal of adoption - statewide data. (\*)
9. Achievement of adoption - on-site.
10. Permanency goal of other permanent living arrangement - on-site.
11. Independent living services - on-site.

### Permanency Outcome 2 - Preserving continuity of family relationships:

1. Proximity of current placement to family - on-site.
2. Placement of children with siblings - on-site.
3. Visiting with parents and siblings while in foster care - on-site.
4. Preserving connections with family - on-site.
5. Relative placements - on-site.
6. Current relationship of children in care with parents - on-site.

### Well-Being Outcome 1 - Enhancing capacity of families to provide for children:

1. Needs assessments and service plans for children, parents and foster parents - on-site.
2. Child and family involvement in case planning - on-site.
3. Worker visits with the child - on-site.
4. Worker visits with the parents - on-site.

Well-Being Outcome 2 - Educational services to children:

1. Children receive appropriate educational services - on-site.

Note: The review will look at extent of coordination with schools by case workers to address the educational needs of children.

Well-Being Outcome 3 - Physical and mental health services:

1. Children receive adequate physical health services - on-site.
2. Children receive adequate mental health services - on-site.

Note: The review will look at referral of children to health care services and utilization of health care services.

National performance standards: The federal government has established national performance standards for selected outcome indicators. These indicators (\*) are also included in the annual child welfare outcome report to Congress.

The national performance standards are based on information currently reported by states. The standards were established at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the states, based on the state averages for these outcomes. The performance standards are designed to serve as goals for states and states not meeting the standards will need to implement program improvement plans with measurable progress toward the performance standards.

- Recurrence of maltreatment – For children who were victims of substantiated abuse or neglect, 5% or less should have another substantiated incident within 6 months.
- Maltreatment in foster care – For all children who are in out-of-home care for the year, 0.4% or less should be victims of substantiated maltreatment by a foster parent or facility staff.
- Foster care re-entry – Of all children who enter out-of-home care in a year, 6% or less should have re-entered care within 12 months of a prior care episode.
- Stability of placements – Of all children who have been in out-of-home care for less than 12 months, 89% or more should have not more than two placements.
- Time to achieve reunification – Of children who were reunified with parents or caretakers at the time of discharge during the year, 78% or more should be reunified within 12 months of entry into care.
- Time to achieve adoption – Of children for whom an adoption was finalized during the year, 36% or more should exit care in less than 24 months of entry into care.

## **FEDERAL CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW – SYSTEMIC FACTORS**

### **1. Information System Capacity**

State is operating a statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location and permanency goals for the placement of every child who is currently in foster care or has been in foster care within preceding 12 months. The information system should support case workers in their case management practice.

### **2. Case Review System**

The state has processes in place that:

- Assures each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes all required provisions.
- Provides for the periodic review of the status of each child no less frequently than once every six months by either a court or by administrative review.
- Assures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the state has a permanency (i.e., dispositional) hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.
- Provides for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA).
- Provides foster parents, pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers of children in foster care with notice of and an opportunity to be heard in any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

### **3. Quality Assurance**

The state has developed and implemented program standards to ensure that children in foster care placements are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.

The state is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in all jurisdictions where the services are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.

### **4. Staff and Provider Training**

The state is operating a staff development and training program that:

- Supports program goals and objectives, addresses provisions under federal Titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.
- Provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the child welfare program.
- Provides short-term training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of state licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under Title IV-E that addresses the skills

and knowledge base necessary to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.

**5. Service Array**

The state has a service planning process in place that assesses the strength and needs of children and families, determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.

The state has an array of services in place to address the needs identified in service plans, the services are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions of the state, and the services can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families.

**6. Agency Responsiveness to Community**

In implementing child welfare program provisions, the state engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court and other public and private child and family serving agencies, and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the child welfare program.

The state agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered under the child welfare program. The state child welfare services are coordinated with services or benefits of other federal or federally-assisted programs serving the same population.

**7. Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention**

The state has implemented standards for foster family homes and child caring institutions that are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards. The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family home or child caring institution receiving Title IV-E or IV-B funds.

The state complies with federal requirements for criminal background clearance as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements, and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.

The state has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.